

Meeting Summary

Design Workshop #2

Executive Office Plaza/Heritage Center

June 26, 2006

Overview

Washington State's Department of General Administration (GA) is currently engaged in a predesign process for two properties at the intersection of 11th and Columbia in the City of Olympia. One property is the site of the current GA building, and the other currently is used for a parking lot and a small office/retail building. This new "Executive Office Plaza/Heritage Center" will be built with the primary purpose of creating new office space for state government.

Several factors are under consideration in this pre-design process. Many government agencies and elected officials are interested in obtaining office space in the new buildings. A portion of one of the new buildings will house a new "Heritage Center" that will include the state library, state archives, and a public museum featuring the history of Washington State. And, given that the buildings are located on the edge of the Capitol Campus leading to downtown Olympia, there is also an opportunity to create a new transitional space or a "gateway" between these two areas.

The Department of General Administration is conducting a public involvement program to elicit public feedback related to this project. The purpose of this public involvement effort is to engage the Olympia community in an ongoing conversation about the future of this part of the Capitol Campus and about the proposed buildings. The opinions gathered through these discussions will be combined with other information provided by potential users of the new buildings, and will be used by the project architects, SRG Partnership, to develop and refine the design for the new facilities.

The goals for this public involvement program include:

- Ensure that members of the Olympia community are well-informed and invited to be involved in the process.
- Engage stakeholders in substantive discussions related to the challenges and issues associated with the predesign planning.
- Summarize the results of the public involvement effort for both the GA and the Washington State Legislature, clearly demonstrating that public opinions have been listened to and incorporated wherever possible.

There will be a total of three public workshops held for the project. The first workshop was held May 8th, and was a general brainstorming to "envision the possibilities" for the new

project. The report for that workshop can be downloaded at:
<http://www.ga.wa.gov/res/eop/index.html>.

After the first workshop the SRG Partnership architectural team developed six alternatives for the project. The second workshop, held June 26th, was an opportunity for the Olympia community to review and comment on these alternatives.

The third and final public workshop will be held July 17th. A completed pre-design for the project will be submitted to the Washington State Legislature in August 2006. If the pre-design is approved for funding, the project will move forward into final design and construction.

June 26th Workshop Summary

This workshop was publicized through emails to community groups and interested organizations, an advertisement that ran twice in the *Olympian*, posters in downtown shops and restaurants, and an invitational postcard mailed via zip-code sort to approximately 3,000 people in the vicinity of the project. Of the 39 people who attended, most said they had heard about the meeting through email, the newspaper ad, the postcard invitation, or from co-workers.

The meeting began with words of welcome from Peter Antolin, Deputy Director of General Administration. Then Dennis Forsyth and Rick Zieve from the SRG Partnership provided an overview of each alternative. At the end of the presentation, meeting participants had time to visit four design alternative “stations”, where they could directly ask questions of, or give their comments to, members of the SRG team. The stations included:

- ✓ Save GA, Alternative A & B
- ✓ Alter GA
- ✓ Demolish GA, Alternative A
- ✓ Demolish GA, Alternative B & C

At the end of this discussion period, participants indicated their opinions about the alternatives by gathering at the station with the design they were “inclined to favor the most”. Meeting facilitator Margaret Norton-Arnold, then used a roving microphone to interview attendees about their reasons for selecting each particular alternative. Some workshop participants did not favor any of the alternatives, and they were also able to share their opinions through this interview portion of the meeting.

In addition to sharing their comments verbally, everyone attending the meeting was provided with a comment form and invited to share their opinions in this format as well. Fourteen of the thirty-nine workshop attendees submitted these comment forms.

SAVE GA – ALTERNATIVE A

Little interest was expressed in the Save GA option. This was somewhat in contrast to the first workshop, where several participants spoke to the importance of saving the building as an example of 1950’s civic architecture. Those who did provide comment at the Save GA station were focused on specific elements of the two Save GA options that were, to a certain extent, applicable to other alternatives. Most often, participants commented on the need to keep Columbia Street open and to preserve current vehicular traffic patterns. Comments were also in

favor of saving or developing buildings on the site with a big “footprint” and imposing character. Only one individual supported saving GA as is, but the primary motivation was that this design alternative preserved the greatest number of trees to the west of the building.

Elements liked the most:

- Like the current GA building.
- More floor space.
- Saves trees on the bluff.
- Preserves views for the “average Joe” state worker instead of executives.
- Buildings are all the same height.
- Keeps Columbia Street open.
- Wastes the least amount of taxpayer money.
- Saves GA and saves the idea of “big” buildings on the Capitol Campus (applies to both “Save” alternatives)
- Preserves a large building footprint which distinguishes Campus from the adjacent neighborhood.
- Provides for improved parking (comment applies to all alternatives).

Elements like the least:

- Doesn’t close Columbia Street.
- Saves GA.
- It will be expensive.
- Saving the GA building severely limits options and it’s not a great building.
- Too much view from Capitol Away is blocked.
- Taller building at 11th and Capitol.
- Concerned about taller buildings on 1063 Block that will impair current views (concern applies to all alternatives).

Questions and additional comments:

- What is the City’s reaction to closing Columbia?
- Relocate the historic old County Courthouse to this site (idea applies to all alternatives).
- The Capitol Campus should never be extended north of Union.
- Preserve all the trees to the west of GA including those on the bluff.

SAVE GA – ALTERNATIVE B

Elements liked the most:

- Saves the current GA building.
- The plaza.

Elements like the least:

- Saving GA.
- It will be expensive.
- Taller building at 11th and Capitol.
- Closing Columbia and 11th.
- No need for more green space and plazas – the Capitol Campus has plenty of this already.

Questions and additional comments:

- Limit or eliminate any stairs on plaza.
- If Columbia is closed, need to create a vehicular alternative west of GA.

ALTER GA

There was limited support for this alternative. Those who did like it said that the atrium and an internal remodel were a good idea as long as the exterior remained the same. There was concern that this alternative would not provide enough square footage for the entire program and that the Heritage Center would suffer as a result. There was also caution about having too much open space, and a comment was made that any new open space needs to be active and inviting throughout the year. Finally, there were mixed feelings about losing road access.

Elements liked the most:

- Terraced hillside building.
- Re-engineers the building to be more user-friendly.
- Heritage Building underground with landscape enhancements.
- Like the idea of an atrium in middle.
- Internal remodel makes sense.
- Don't alter the exterior (and make the building something it is not).

Elements like the least:

- Center atrium seems like a very risky proposition.
- Earns less return on investment.
- Having to remove existing structures.
- Too costly.
- Taller building at 11th and Capitol.
- Don't want the same building with a hole in the center – needs to look different.
- Don't want a 50 year old building – we need a 100-200 year building.
- Not enough square footage – don't water down the Heritage Building.

- Losing the road is unacceptable – need vehicle access to parking lots behind the capitol –consider a road on the bluff by moving buildings inward.
- Pushes too much traffic onto Capitol Way.
- No stairs on the plaza.
- Like the idea of the Heritage Center (design into the hillside) but perceive it to be unsafe in earthquake.
- Concerned that we may have too much open space – don’t want shady, unoccupied, or unsafe open spaces.
- Open spaces in shadows won’t be desirable.
- Building should come down – don’t like this alternative.
- Would like to preserve Columbia.
- Don’t reclad the building – doesn’t make sense to preserve the building if you are going to alter the exterior.

Questions and additional comments:

- Don’t limit campus to its current size – consider expanding by buying the apartment building.
- Maximizing vehicle access should not be a priority.

DEMOLISH GA – ALTERNATIVE A

Most meeting attendees indicated that this was their favorite alternative. Several people strongly favored the terracing, as it provides an open area for people to visit and enjoy the view, and would be aesthetically pleasing, especially with proper landscaping. Many liked elements of the layout such as the blending of the plaza into the gardens, and the way the building parallels Cherry Lane. Those who favored this alternative felt that it would not overwhelm the campus. At the same time, it captures the formal nature of the Capitol Dome and the original Olmstead design. Another view expressed was that this design would provide a “grand entranceway” into this side of the campus. There were few negative comments about this alternative, however concerns were raised that building heights may cast shadows on other buildings, and that the plaza space may be better used as building space. As with the other alternatives, the potential closure of Columbia to vehicular traffic was a concern to a number of people attending the meeting.

Specific comments included:

Elements liked the most:

- The terracing is excellent.
- The underground area is a good place for the archives.
- Provides good options for views and accessibility.
- Won’t overwhelm the capitol.
- How the plaza blends into the gardens.

- Building the Heritage Center into the hill allows the building to be lower.
- The geometry matches the original design concept.
- Open entryway from the street.
- This alternative captures the formal nature of state capitols.
- Fixes the ugly entrance from Union.
- Creates a welcoming curved entry plaza at Union/Capitol.
- The parking below ground.
- The plaza is a nice place for people to visit and relax.
- The building parallel to Cherry Lane.
- The greenhouse is gone.
- It provides adequate space to handle all of the programming needs.

Elements like the least:

- The building heights may cast shadows on other buildings.
- It is a mistake to break the grid and close Columbia Street or 11th. Columbia is part of the transportation system and the city's "connected streets" policy.
- Do not want any part of the campus north of Union.
- The plaza – we don't need plaza space, we need office space.
- The new building doesn't relate nicely to the open area in front.

Questions and additional comments:

- Add an interactive fountain kids can play in.
- There is an opportunity to rethink how heating and cooling is achieved.
- What will it look like vertically?
- Hopefully it will be perceived that the entrance is at Union which will help traffic flow.
- Is there space to add a small recreation center?
- We do not want stairs on the plaza.
- Would like a stronger urban edge with sidewalks and landscaping that create a boundary.
- Use classic height to width ratio for sidewalks.
- Open space is not a priority.
- Who is the parking for? Need parking closer to the center of campus.
- Create an outdoor amphitheatre as part of the terracing.
- It's important the glass of the Heritage Center is well covered with landscaping.

- Regarding the height – the scale needs to be large, but livable.
- Some green space is not currently well managed – if green space is added it must be beautifully landscaped and maintained.

DEMOLISH GA – ALTERNATIVE B

Although “Demolish GA – Alternative A” appeared to be favored by most of those at the workshop, Alternatives B and C also garnered a fair amount of positive reactions. Some people liked the angled building on the bluff, although there was more support for the Heritage Center to be built into the hillside (Alternative A and C) rather than being built on top of the bluff. Several people felt that the arrangements of the buildings in these alternatives would create more open views between Capitol Way and the main portion of the campus. As with other alternatives, the potential closure of Columbia Street received mixed reactions from those attending the workshop. Many people like the idea of a more pedestrian-oriented environment in this area. An equal number, however, were concerned that the closure of either Columbia or 11th to vehicular traffic would serve as a serious impediment to traffic flow, and would only increase congestion in the area.

The design of the open spaces between and beside the buildings is another area of significant debate. Several attendees commented that the campus does not need any additional plaza space; there is plenty to be had already. Others liked the idea of a plaza, however, saying that it is preferable to stand on a hard surface to watch an event rather than sinking into the grass, especially when it is raining. Finally, the edge between the new buildings and the downtown area was the focus of considerable discussion. There were questions about whether or not this area should be designed as “green space”, with the comment made that the intersection with the city should have more of an “urban edge” to it.

Elements liked the most:

- Terraced hillside building.
- Angle of the building to the bluff.
- The open space.
- Columbia Street is closed.
- Clearer definition of end of campus.
- Larger plaza area. Plaza is better than lawn, which is not useable when it is raining.
- Blocks less of the view from Capitol Way.

Elements like the least:

- It looks and feels too “blocky”, like the east campus.
- Taller building at 11th and Capitol.
- The layout is square and boring.
- More traditional.
- Does not address the hillside.
- Does not tie to the city or the flat land.

- The “walls” on the north side of the buildings are too abrupt and too jarring.
- We do not want stairs on the plaza.

Questions and additional comments:

- Is there enough square footage?
- If the Heritage Center is above ground, will it be as attractive as it could be if it were built into the hillside?
- There is an apartment building to the north that should be included in this project.

DEMOLISH GA – ALTERNATIVE C

Elements liked the most:

- Closing Columbia Street and making it into a pedestrian feature.
- Maintains 11th Avenue.

Elements like the least:

- Buildings look and feel disconnected - the juxtaposition of two rectangles.
- Taller building at 11th and Capitol.
- Would be nice to incorporate the hillside center.
- Divides plaza opportunity too much.
- We do not want stairs on the plaza.

Questions and additional comments:

- Traffic issues at Capitol Way/Union and Capitol Way/11th will need to be seriously looked at for pedestrian issues.
- Transition to city park could house sculptures relative to Washington State.
- No substantial public access thus destroying the tie to the city.
- It's good that you are trying to tie into the original Olmstead design. However, Olmstead had a curvilinear feel which are squared off by these designs. Let's not have Olmstead light here!
- The design and construction money should be put into the buildings, not into the green/open spaces or the plazas. We have plenty of those around here already.
- All of these designs suffer the fatal flaw of vacating 11th and Columbia. There are already long lines of traffic and this will only add to the congestion.

- It may be okay to close Columbia Street, but you still have to do something that maintains traffic flow in this area.
- I am not in favor of any design that eliminates any trees. People walk around the lake to see green, not to see buildings.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- Against the state becoming a landlord for restaurant and retail when there are more state agencies wanting to be on the capitol campus than there is room available. A small coffee shop and Washington State history items for tourists would be fine.
- Keep Columbia Street open.
- Would like a stronger urban edge with sidewalks and landscaping that create a boundary.
- Do not want any campus building north of Union.
- The need for green space needs to be evaluated city-wide.
- Don't want green space in lieu of buildings.
- If green space is added it needs to be maintained.
- We can have larger, architecturally beautiful buildings.
- Would like a visual art gallery as part of the Heritage Center.
- Meet with various neighborhood associations (Eastside, Bigelow, etc) to show them how the new buildings will look and impact them once the places go vertical.